

Participation of Pakistan Social Forum in the World Social Forum Mumbai 2004 – Report Back

The Pakistan Social Forum organized in Lahore on January 12, 2004 was a real success as it welcomed more than 8000 active citizens from all over the country. This event made history and established a new tradition of political dialogue. The success of the PSF is principally due to the support of a wide range of organizations such as peace groups, political parties, trade unions, Human Rights networks, fisher folk's forums, peasants and farmers groups, lawyers, journalists, teachers associations, students groups and many other civil society organizations and individuals.

One of the main goals of the PSF was to create a momentum for a large Pakistani participation to the World Social Forum Mumbai 2004 (WSF2004). This goal was achieved by sending more than 500 Pakistani citizens to participate in the WSF2004. This delegation – the largest Pakistani group ever to participate in any events in India – organized eight seminars, four press briefings and five demonstrations and participated to numerous other activities during WSF2004. The issues raised during these events included poor peasantry of Punjab, the allotment of the Gwadar Port's land to foreign companies, the decreasing fish stokes in coastal areas of Sindh and the concerns of fisher folk and, privatization and distribution of water.

The only cloud in the picture was that more than 700 delegates were left behind, as visas were not issued on time.

The presence of a large number of Pakistani citizens in this world event – attended by more than 125, 000 international delegates – symbolized the commitment of the Pakistan civil society to contribute to current efforts promoting peace and cooperation between India and Pakistan and to voice its concerns against advances of neo-liberal agenda.

Both the national and international media provided a really good coverage of the activities of the Pakistan delegation as television and newspapers interviewed many Pakistani delegates. Their position promoting friendship between India and Pakistan was greatly appreciated by the media as well as by the people in the streets of Mumbai during demonstrations.

A clear indication of the success of the Pakistani delegation is the request – from the International Committee of World Social Forum – to have the next South Asian Social Forum in Pakistan at the end of 2004.

After this series of successful events, the Pakistan Social Forum believe that there is a need to review the process, outcomes and draw results and lessons for future. Therefore all Pakistan provincial councils will organize review meetings during the month February 2004. The results of these evaluations will be presented in a meeting of the PSF National Steering Committee meeting currently plan for the end of February or early March. If you wish more information on the Pakistan Social Forum please contact both Isabelle Valois at ivalois@sapcanada.org or Irfan Mufti at irfan@sappk.org